

# Sex, Charades, and Census Records: Locating Female Sex Trade Workers in a Victorian City

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*Prostitution was a prominent issue in Canada during the late nineteenth century. In many Canadian cities, female sex-trade workers resided in brothels located in so-called red-light districts. Although they were enumerated in every decennial census, sex-trade workers have been overlooked by historical demographers, urban geographers, and census historians because they used euphemisms such as dressmaker to disguise their occupation. Using Victoria (British Columbia) as a case study, this essay shows how female brothel keepers and brothel prostitutes can be identified on manuscript census schedules from 1891 and 1901 and how the records can delineate the geography of sexual commerce in a Victorian city. In the process, questions arise about the prima facie value of aggregate census data.*

*La question de la prostitution était importante au Canada à la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Dans beaucoup de villes canadiennes, les travailleuses du sexe habitaient des maisons de prostitution situées dans les quartiers communément appelés de débauche. Bien que les travailleuses du sexe aient été dénombrées à chaque recensement décennal, les démographes, les géographes urbains et les historiens du recensement s'en sont désintéressés parce qu'elles se disaient couturières pour dissimuler leur profession. Cet essai, qui s'intéresse au cas de Victoria (en Colombie-Britannique), montre comment faire pour identifier les tenancières et les prostituées des maisons de passe sur les tableaux manuscrits du recensement de 1891 à 1901 et comment utiliser les documents pour délimiter le territoire du commerce sexuel dans une ville de l'époque victorienne. Durant le processus, des questions surgissent quant à la valeur, à prime abord, des données agrégées du recensement.*

ALICE SEYMOUR was a well-known madam in Victoria, British Columbia. She operated a brothel at No. 11 Kane Street from the late 1880s to the early 1900s, during which time she provided accommodation

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for many female prostitutes. Regrettably, Seymour did not leave any record of her establishment. No account books, diaries, payroll ledgers, or staff photographs survive. But Seymour and some of the women who lived in her brothel were enumerated in 1891 and again ten years later, in 1901. On both occasions they provided their names and a great deal of personal information to the enumerators who interviewed them.<sup>1</sup> The information was recorded on nominal census schedules that, fortunately for social historians, have been preserved on microfilm.

Census records have provided the foundation for many important studies relating to women, work, and the urban milieu in nineteenth-century Canada.<sup>2</sup> Very few of those studies, however, have mentioned the sex trade. In fact, the term “prostitution” is almost entirely absent in historical demography in Canada.<sup>3</sup> The omission is curious. We know that some working-class women were involved in the sex trade during the late nineteenth century and that prostitution was a major concern for moral reformers in Canada during the period.<sup>4</sup> We also know that

1 The nominal census schedule, with information on Seymour and her household in 1891, is available on microfilm from Library and Archives Canada [hereafter LAC]. See microfilm reel T6292, Victoria City, District 4, sub-district 4 c-1, p. 25, family #108. The nominal schedule for 1901 is also available on microfilm from LAC, microfilm reel T6429, Victoria City, District 4, sub-district 6, p. 27 for Seymour's household. A somewhat fanciful description of Seymour appears in Valerie Green, *Upstarts and Outcasts. Victoria's Not-so-Proper Past* (Victoria: Hordsdal & Schubart, 2000), pp. 107–108, 116.

2 Census-based studies relating to gender and labour include Suzanne Cross, “The Neglected Majority: The Changing Role of Women in Nineteenth-Century Montreal,” *Histoire sociale / Social History*, vol. 6, no. 12 (November 1973), pp. 202–233; Bettina Bradbury, “Pigs, Cows and Boarders: Non-Wage Forms of Survival among Montreal Families, 1861–1891,” *Labour/ Le travail*, vol. 14 (Fall 1984), pp. 9–46; Eric W. Sager and Peter Baskerville, “Locating the Unemployed in Urban British Columbia: Evidence from the 1891 Census,” *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 25 (Fall 1990), pp. 38–54; D. A. Muise, “The Industrial Context of Inequality: Female Participation in Nova Scotia's Paid Labour Force, 1871–1921,” *Acadiensis*, vol. 20 (Spring 1991), pp. 3–31; Peter Baskerville, “She Has Already Hinted at Board: Enterprising Urban Women in British Columbia, 1863–1896,” *Histoire sociale / Social History*, vol. 26 (1993), pp. 205–283; Kris Inwood and Richard Reid, “Gender and Occupational Identity in a Canadian Census,” *Historical Methods*, vol. 34, no. 2 (Spring 2001), pp. 57–70.

3 Michael B. Katz acknowledged the existence of the sex trade in his pioneering work, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West. Family and Class in a Mid-Nineteenth-Century City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 55–57. Katz identified two brothel-owners in his study, which is built on census records from 1851 and 1861. Bettina Bradbury acknowledged that working-class widows and their daughters in Montreal sometimes engaged in the sex trade as a survival strategy. See Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender, and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993), pp. 198, 205, 208. However, the sex trade is not mentioned anywhere in the detailed and exhaustive study by Marjorie Griffin Cohen, *Women's Work, Markets and Economic Development in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988).

4 See Lori Rotenberg, “The Wayward Worker: Toronto's Prostitute at the Turn of the Century” in Janice Acton, Penny Goldsmith, and Bonnie Sheppard, eds., *Women at Work: Ontario, 1850–1930* (Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1974), pp. 33–69; Mariana Valverde, *The Age of*

red-light districts were a distinctive feature in many communities, especially in Western Canada.<sup>5</sup>

Why, then, have sex-trade workers been overlooked by historical demographers, urban geographers, and census historians? Several explanations might be suggested, but the most likely reason involves an apparent dearth of evidence. Prostitutes were rarely described as such when they were enumerated. When prostitutes were recorded on nominal census schedules, the space beside their names for “occupation, trade or calling” was left blank, or some innocuous term or euphemism — such as dressmaker — was entered in the space. Either way, key information is missing, and, as a result, sex-trade workers have been camouflaged in census schedules.

Sex-trade workers may be camouflaged, but they are not invisible. It is possible to identify them on nominal census schedules if we read the records carefully, consider them in context, and are cognizant of certain code words. In this case study of Victoria, British Columbia, using records from the 1891 census and the 1901 census, I show how brothel-keepers and brothel prostitutes can be identified in manuscript census schedules, how the records might be used to construct a prosopographical profile of these sex-trade workers, and how the records can assist in mapping the geography of sexual commerce in a nineteenth-century city. In the process, I raise questions about the *prima facie* value of census records.

### **The Nature of Census Records**

Census records are problematic. Census-making is a political process, and census-taking an imprecise exercise, as Bruce Curtis has shown in his landmark study *The Politics of Population*, and as Eric Sager and Peter Baskerville have noted in their introduction to a recent work on the

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*Light, Soap, and Water. Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885–1925* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991); Carolyn Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880–1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

5 James H. Gray, *Red Lights on the Prairies* (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1995). This popular work was first published in 1971. See also Alan Artibise, *Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth, 1874–1914* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1975), especially the chapter entitled “Red Lights in Winnipeg: Segregated Vice, Moral Reformers, and Civic Politics,” pp. 246–264; Judy Bedford, “Prostitution in Calgary, 1905–1914,” *Alberta History*, vol. 29, no. 2 (Spring 1981), pp. 1–11; Deborah Nilson, “The Social Evil: Prostitution in Vancouver 1900–1920,” in Barbara Latham and Cathy Kess, eds., *In Her Own Right* (Victoria: Camosun College, 1980), pp. 205–228; Charleen P. Smith, “Boomtown Brothels in the Kootenays, 1895–1905” in Jonathan Swainger and Constance Backhouse, eds., *People and Place: Historical Influences on Legal Culture* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2003), pp. 120–152; Rhonda L. Hinthner, “The Oldest Profession in Winnipeg: The Culture of Prostitution in the Point Douglas Segregated District, 1909–1912,” *Manitoba History*, no. 41 (Spring/Summer 2001), pp. 2–13.

1901 Canadian census, *Household Counts*.<sup>6</sup> Census records relating to women are especially problematic because women's economic contributions were not always recognized by enumerators and because national censuses have tended to "construct social reality in the interests of a male-dominated political and economic elite."<sup>7</sup>

Census records relating to female sex-trade workers are even more challenging to the historian. The records are contentious for several reasons. First of all, although prostitution itself was not illegal, nearly every activity associated with prostitution was illegal in late-nineteenth-century Canada. As Constance Backhouse has noted, between 1869 and 1892, legislation relating to the "evils of prostitution" burgeoned; by the end of the century, virtually "every aspect of prostitution except the actual and specific act of commercial exchange for sexual services" was prohibited.<sup>8</sup> This meant that "keepers of bawdy houses or houses of ill-fame," "inmates [residents] of bawdy houses," and anyone who supported themselves "by the avails of prostitution" could be prosecuted under the Criminal Code.<sup>9</sup> In many communities, including Victoria, "common prostitutes or street-walkers" and anyone who acted in a "lewd" manner in a public place could also be prosecuted under local by-laws.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly,

6 Bruce Curtis, *The Politics of Population. State Formation, Statistics, and the Census of Canada, 1840–1875* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001); Eric W. Sager and Peter Baskerville, eds., *Household Counts: Canadian Households and Families in 1901* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

7 Peter Baskerville and Eric W. Sager, *Unwilling Idlers: The Urban Unemployed and their Families in Late Victorian Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), p. 196. The challenge of using census records to examine women's labour has also engaged British and American historians. See, for example, Eilidh M. Garrett, "The Dawning of a New Era? Women's Work in England and Wales at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," *Histoire sociale / Social History*, vol. 28, no. 56 (November 1995), pp. 421–465; Elizabeth Herr, "The Census, Estimation Biases, and Female Labor-Force Participation Rates in 1880 Colorado," *Historical Methods*, vol. 28, no. 4 (Fall 1995), pp. 167–181.

8 See Constance B. Backhouse, "Nineteenth-Century Canadian Prostitution Law: Reflection of a Discriminatory Society," *Histoire sociale / Social History*, vol. 18, no. 36 (November 1985), pp. 387–423. Backhouse summarizes the impact of late-nineteenth-century legislation on pp. 394–395. See also Backhouse, *Petticoats and Prejudice: Women and Law in Nineteenth Century Canada* (Toronto: Women's Press, published for the Osgoode Society, 1991), chap. 8, "Prostitution."

9 Prostitution was also an offence under the 1907 *Immigration Act*: "No immigrant shall be permitted to land in Canada who has been convicted of a crime involving moral turpitude, or who is a prostitute, or who procures, or brings or attempts to bring into Canada prostitutes or women for purposes of prostitution." *Statutes of Canada*. 6 Edw. VII, chap. 19, s. 29.

10 See John McLaren, "Chasing the Social Evil: the Evolution of Canada's Prostitution Laws, 1867–1917," *Canadian Journal of Law and Society*, vol. 1 (1986), pp. 125–166. In Victoria, prosecutions could be laid under the *Public Morals By-Law* (1888). Under this ordinance, authorities could prosecute persons who used "profane, obscene, blasphemous or grossly insulting language" and persons who committed "any other immorality or indecency in the City of Victoria." Corporation of the City of Victoria, *Revised, Amended and Consolidated By-Laws* (Victoria: T. R. Cusack, 1901), p. 255.

brothel prostitutes and brothel-keepers had to be circumspect when describing their work to census-takers, even though enumerators were sworn to maintain the confidentiality of any information disclosed to them.<sup>11</sup>

Census records relating to female sex-trade workers are also difficult to decipher because of the casual and uncertain nature of prostitution. Prostitutes often drifted in and out of the sex trade, depending on their economic circumstances.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, many prostitutes derived a portion of their incomes from occupations outside the sex trade.<sup>13</sup> Thus a sometime waitress who happened to be working as a prostitute at the time of the census would likely have described herself as a waitress when she was interviewed by an enumerator. The situation was obfuscated further when enumerators entered misleading information on the nominal census schedules. Alice Seymour's household at 11 Kane Street is a case in point. In the 1901 census, Seymour was described as a "lodging house keeper." Her household included several young women who were recorded as "lodgers" and identified with various occupations, including "dressmaker." The census official who enumerated Seymour's establishment likely knew he was visiting a brothel, not a respectable boarding house, but it was not his place to challenge the information provided. The process of enumeration was precise, and enumerators were required to adhere strictly to a set of rules when they recorded information on the nominal census schedules. We can be relatively confident, therefore, that, when the enumerator described Alice Seymour as a "lodging house keeper" and some of her lodgers as "dressmakers," he was simply

11 Beginning in 1881, enumerators were sworn to maintain the confidentiality of any information they received during the course of the census. The administration and logistics of the census are described in Patrick A. Dunae, "Making the 1891 Census in British Columbia," *Histoire sociale / Social History*, vol. 31, no. 62 (November 1998), pp. 223–239.

12 The fluid and transient nature of the sex trade is described in Smith, "Boomtown Brothels in the Kootenays," pp. 120–152. See also Ruth A. Frager and Carmel Patrias, *Discounted Labour: Women Workers in Canada, 1870–1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005). Frager and Patrias note that some women "who turned to prostitution in desperation did so on a temporary basis, depending on the availability of other jobs, while others resorted to prostitution on the side to supplement their earnings from 'respectable' jobs that did not pay a living wage." The authors add that "some women workers apparently became prostitutes because they believed that work in the sex trade was easier and more lucrative than toiling away at a 'legitimate' job such as domestic service or garment work" (pp. 50–51).

13 Charlene Porsild provides a good description of survival strategies and occupational patterns of women in the red-light districts of Dawson City during this period. See Porsild, *Gamblers and Dreamers: Women, Men, and Community in the Klondike* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999). The author notes that many women in the Dawson City *demi-monde* "combined incomes drawn as laundresses, dressmakers, waitresses, performers, and prostitutes" (p. 126).

recording information provided to him. Likewise, it was not the enumerator's place to infer information *not* specifically provided. In such cases, the column reserved on the census schedule for a person's "occupation, trade or calling" was left blank.

By following these procedures to the letter — that is, by completing the forms carefully, by recording occupations verbatim, and by omitting information not explicitly provided — the enumerator was executing his duties diligently. He was honouring the promise he made when he was enrolled as an enumerator and swore an oath under the *Census Act*. In affirming his oath, the enumerator promised "solemnly and sincerely" to "faithfully and exactly" discharge all of his duties "to the utmost of [his] skill and ability."<sup>14</sup> Most enumerators, including the one who recorded Alice Seymour's household, acquitted themselves well. Nevertheless, they provided a disguise for posterity for Seymour and some of the other women who comprised the *demi-monde* of Victoria. Indeed, census enumerators and the government officials who supervised them were part of charade in which agents of the state and deviant members of society played a role. Although not generally understood by historians, the charade becomes clear when we examine census records in conjunction with other records that relate to social deviancy and urban space from the same period. Victoria is a good place to examine the charade because the city's population is well documented in terms of its size, location, and character.

For Victoria, we can draw upon all nominal census records from the third (1891) and the fourth (1901) decennial census of Canada. The records have been transcribed, coded, and integrated in an extensive database. The data is available online at an authoritative, scholarly website called *viHistory.ca*.<sup>15</sup> As the *viHistory* website was constructed, the manuscript census schedules were scrutinized closely to eliminate or clarify as many transcription errors and ambiguities as possible. For the city of Victoria, therefore, we are working with a large and exceptionally clean data set.<sup>16</sup> Moreover — and of no little importance in this study — the search engine for the online database was designed to enable researchers

14 Dunae, "Making the 1891 Census in British Columbia," p. 238, citing the official *Statistical Year-Book of Canada* (1895), p. 156.

15 The website is located at <http://www.viHistory.ca>. All of the nominal records used in this study can be accessed at this site.

16 Manuscript census data for the City of Victoria, 1891, were transcribed and coded by the Public History Group at the University of Victoria. Census records from 1901 were transcribed and coded at the University of Victoria as part of the Canadian Family History Project. The two data sets, along with data from the 1881 census, were integrated into the *viHistory* online database. Launched in 2003, the *viHistory* website is a joint venture of the University of Victoria and Vancouver Island University.

to reconstitute census households.<sup>17</sup> As a result, we can clearly see social and spatial relationships between individuals within a census household.

Social deviancy for the period is documented in records generated by the Victoria City Police Department. Police charge books dating from the late 1880s are particularly revealing, providing the names, ages, origins, occupations, and physical descriptions of everyone arrested for any type of offence, from loitering to murder.<sup>18</sup> As might be expected, women identified as “prostitutes” appear in the charge books, and most were brothel prostitutes rather than street-walkers. They appear in the record books on charges of “keeping a bawdy house or house of ill fame” or with being an “inmate of a house of ill-fame.”<sup>19</sup> The charge books also link them with other offences, such as larceny, destruction of property, and receiving stolen goods, but these are incidental to this study. For our purposes, the charge books are useful because they identify brothel-keepers and brothel prostitutes. By locating those women in manuscript census schedules, we can start to reconstruct their census households, and at that point we can interrogate the records closely.

We can situate census households within the larger community by consulting contemporary directories; in the process, we can determine the geography of sexual commerce in Victoria. Directories — also called business or commercial directories and gazetteers — were compiled for towns and cities across Canada during the nineteenth century. Typically, directories included the names and addresses of employers and householders in a community.<sup>20</sup> The gazetteers were not definitive, because the names of casual labourers, Aboriginal residents, and members of ethnic minorities were often omitted. Nevertheless, as George Young and John Lutz note in a research guide to nineteenth-century British Columbia directories, these publications “hold much valuable and under used information.”<sup>21</sup> Directories compiled by

17 Alex Dunae designed the search query for *viHistory* in 2003. The query is unique in machine-readable databases derived from historical census records. In 2006 the *viHistory* website was rebuilt using open source tools by David Badke in the Humanities Computing and Media Centre at the University of Victoria. The integrated database comprises over 100,000 census and directory records.

18 This study has utilized information from the police charge books, Series CB 1 (1889–1902), held by the Victoria Police Department. I appreciate the cooperation of the Victoria Police Department and especially the assistance of Jonathan P. R. Sheldon, of the Victoria Police Department’s Forensic Identification Service, in making these records available to me. In compiling this study, I also consulted a related series of records (Victoria Magistrates Charge Books/Police Court, Series 114) available in the City of Victoria Archives.

19 During the period examined in this study, local authorities accepted brothels but were intolerant of street prostitution. Street prostitutes were harassed and so constituted a relatively small segment of the sex trade in Victoria. This study focuses on brothel prostitution rather than street prostitution.

20 Gareth Shaw, “Nineteenth Century Directories as Sources in Canadian Social History,” *Archivaria*, no. 14 (Summer 1982), pp. 107–122; LAC, *Canadian Directories*, <http://www.collectionscanada.ca/canadiandirectories/index-e.html> (accessed June 27, 2007).

21 George Young and John S. Lutz, *The Researcher’s Guide to British Columbia Nineteenth Century Directories: A Bibliography and Index* (Victoria: Public History Group, University of Victoria,

R. T. Williams & Company and the Henderson Directory Company were particularly valuable for this study. *Williams' Illustrated Official British Columbia Directory* (1892) included an alphabetical directory and a street directory for the city of Victoria. *Williams' Directory* was compiled in September 1891, four months after the Dominion census was taken; as a result, there is considerable overlap between names on the census and names in the directory. The ninth edition of *Henderson's City of Victoria Directory* (1902) was compiled in October 1901 and so augments the 1901 census, which got underway in March that year.<sup>22</sup> The two directories are remarkably inclusive, insofar as they include the names of brothel operators and brothel prostitutes, although they did not identify them as such. The directories also provide street addresses for many of the brothels. With this information, we can map the geography of Victoria's sex trade during the census years of 1891 and 1901.<sup>23</sup>

Records generated by a check census were also helpful in establishing the geography of sexual commerce in Victoria. The check census was initiated in September 1891, soon after the official census returns were published by the federal government. The city's leading newspaper, the *Daily Colonist*, members of the local Board of Trade, and Victoria city council believed that Victoria had been under-counted and so contracted the firm of R. T. Williams & Company to carry out a check census. The check census is useful because it includes the street addresses of persons who were enumerated, which the 1891 Dominion census did not. By referencing names on the Victoria check census to names on the Victoria portion of the Dominion census, we were able to connect nominal data from the official 1891 census to specific locations in the city.<sup>24</sup>

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1988). The authors note, "Used with the same degree of care and caution that researchers should take to any of their sources, directories hold much valuable and under used information" (p. 9).

22 See R. T. Williams, ed., *Williams' illustrated official British Columbia directory, 1892; under the patronage of the Dominion and provincial governments, as well as the various municipalities throughout the province, containing general information and directories of all the cities and settlements in British Columbia, with a classified business directory* (Victoria: Colonist Printers, 1892); and *Henderson's British Columbia Gazetteer and Directory ... Comprising Complete Alphabetical Directories of the Cities and Complete Business Directory* (Victoria and Vancouver: Henderson Publishing Company, 1902).

23 Several American scholars have used city directories to help identify and locate brothels in the American West. I have utilized the directories in the same way in this study. See Joel Best, *Controlling Vice: Regulating Brothel Prostitution in St. Paul, 1865-1883* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1986); Anne M. Butler, *Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery: Prostitutes in the American West, 1865-1890* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985); Marion S. Goldman, *Gold Diggers & Silver Miners. Prostitution and Social Life on the Comstock Lode* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981); Jan MacKell, *Brothels, Bordellos, & Bad Girls: Prostitution in Colorado, 1860-1930* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004).

24 A copy of the 1891 Victoria check census was forwarded through the British Columbia Provincial Secretary's office to the Dominion Statistician in the federal Department of Agriculture. At some point in the 1950s, the manuscript was microfilmed and a copy sent to the British Columbia Archives in Victoria, where it is accessioned as: Census of Victoria [1891], Add. MSS 1908,



### Taking the Census

Before locating the sex trade in Victoria, it may be helpful to recall the characteristics of the census and the process of enumeration. Historically, Canada has used a *de jure* rather than a *de facto* type of census. In the *de jure* system, persons are enumerated according to their permanent abode rather than where they are actually located at the time the census is taken. Therefore, we can assume that persons whose names were recorded by enumerators in a particular community — in this case, Victoria — were deemed to be permanent residents of that community. In the *de jure* system, a target date is set as a reference point for the count, and the population is enumerated as it would have existed on that particular date. In Canada's third decennial census, the target date was Monday, April 6, 1891. For the fourth decennial census, the target date was Monday, March 31, 1901.

Enumeration units in Canada were based on federal electoral districts and polling divisions, and in larger cities census sub-divisions corresponded to municipal wards and precincts.<sup>25</sup> In all cases, census tracts were clearly delineated, and enumerators were expected to be familiar with them before the census got underway. As the official *Manual containing the 'Census Act' and Instructions to Officers employed in the taking the third census of Canada* (1891) declared, in the convoluted prose of the bureaucracy: "An intelligent and well-trained enumerator will, in fact, generally speaking, know beforehand what are, as a whole, the conditions of every family in his sub-district."<sup>26</sup> In practice, this meant that a red-light district would not be *terra incognita* to an astute census taker.

Enumerators were required to visit and describe every occupied habitation within their district. In 1891, enumerators were supposed to record structural details for every dwelling, indicating whether it was constructed of wood, brick, or stone and how many floors and rooms it contained. In 1901, enumerators were required to note the location or street address of each household they visited. Since enumerators were required

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microfilm reel A-1356. For more information about the check census, see Dunae, "Making the 1891 Census in British Columbia," p. 235.

25 In the city of Victoria, electoral wards were used as enumeration units in the 1891 and 1901 censuses. Ward boundaries were described in Victoria city by-laws, which have been transcribed and posted on the *viHistory.ca* website. In other cities, where the boundaries of wards and census sub-districts are not available, researchers may be able to reconstruct enumeration units from contemporary maps, directories, and nominal census schedules. The process is described in Ian Buck, David Jordan, Shaun Mannella, and Larry McCann, "Reconstructing the Geographical Framework of the 1901 Census of Canada," *Historical Methods*, vol. 33, no. 4 (Fall 2000), pp. 199–205.

26 Canada. Department of Agriculture (Census Branch), *Manual containing "The Census Act," and the Instructions to Officers employed in the taking of the third census of Canada, 1891* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1891), p. 7. Hereafter noted as *Census Manual* (1891).

to register and record the built environment, they could not have failed to notice the moral environment of a neighbourhood.

Ultimately, the enumerator's task was to describe accurately every "census family" within his district. The "census family" was a fundamental unit. In the official *Manual containing Instructions to Officers* (1891) the term was defined as follows: "A Family, as understood for the purposes of the census, may consist of one person living alone or of any number of persons living together under one roof and having their food provided together."<sup>27</sup> Thus a "census family" might comprise a traditional nuclear family or persons who were not blood relatives but were living in the same place, as in a boarding house or a brothel. Census families were numbered consecutively within each census sub-division. In urban centres like Victoria, this usually meant that census family No. 2 was in close proximity to census family No. 1 and so on. It is relatively easy to reconstruct an enumerator's walk within an enumeration area in 1891 and to place census households in relation to each other within a neighbourhood.<sup>28</sup> The process is even easier for 1901, when enumerators recorded the street address for each household.

The Canadian census was patterned on the British census, but there were notable differences in how populations in the Dominion and the United Kingdom were recorded. In Britain, enumerators distributed blank census forms to householders. The forms were completed by householders and retrieved by enumerators a few days later.<sup>29</sup> In Canada, the process was more rigorous. Enumerators were supposed to interview personally every adult in every census household. The information was entered on a form called *Schedule One: Nominal Return of the Living*.

The nominal schedule in 1891 consisted of 24 questions dealing with age, nativity, civil condition, religion, and occupation. The schedule was designed so that one person would be identified as the head of the household and others would be assigned relative positions such as wife of head, son of head, lodger, and so forth. In some census families, particularly

27 *Census Manual* (1891), p. 5.

28 Spatial locators, such as street addresses and property lot numbers, were not included on the census until 1901, but, from 1889 onwards, street names and house numbers were printed in Victoria city directories. This information has been helpful in placing households within census sub-districts in 1891.

29 The logistics of the British census are described in Michael Drake, "The Census, 1801–1891" in E. A. Wrigley, ed., *Nineteenth Century Society: Essays in the Use of Quantitative Methods for the Study of Social Data* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Richard Lawton, ed., *The Census and Social Structure: An Interpretive Guide to Nineteenth Century Censuses for England and Wales* (London: Frank Cass, 1978); Edward Higgs, *Life, Death and Statistics: Civil Registration, Censuses and the Work of the General Register Office, 1836–1952. A Local Population Studies Supplement* (Hatfield, UK: Local Population Studies, 2004).

nuclear family units, the head of household may have supplied information about everyone in the household, but in extended census family households individual members probably answered themselves. This was likely the case in 1901. The nominal schedule in the fourth decennial census, which consisted of 34 questions, was more comprehensive than previous schedules. In addition to basic questions concerning nativity, occupation, marital status, and religious affiliation, the 1901 schedule required detailed information on a wide range of topics. People were asked not simply to state their ages, but to give the day, month, and year of birth. They were asked about racial origin and mother tongue. Residents born in Canada were asked whether they had been born in a rural or urban community; residents born outside the country were required to indicate when they had arrived in Canada and whether they were naturalized citizens. Respondents were asked if they were employers or employees, whether they received a salary or wage, or whether they supported themselves by “their own means” from other sources of income.<sup>30</sup>

The actual process involved an enumerator asking the questions in sequence and recording the answers on large (30 cm by 38 cm) folio sheets. The information could not have been entered hastily or haphazardly. It must have taken close to an hour to complete schedules for an average census household, especially if enumerators followed to the letter instructions provided by the census office in Ottawa. Enumerators were told to be “painstaking” and “scrupulous” when completing the schedules. “Never insert anything which is not stated or distinctly acknowledged by the person giving the information,” they were told. Moreover, they were supposed to confirm and clarify personal information at the end of the census interview. “In every case [the enumerator] must read over the facts he has taken to the person from whom he has obtained them, for checking the correctness of his entries.”<sup>31</sup>

Enumerators were enjoined to be precise when recording occupations. “You cannot be too explicit in stating occupations,” the official census *Manual* declared in 1891.<sup>32</sup> Five pages in the *Manual* were devoted to this issue, and dozens of examples were provided to illustrate the level of detail required.<sup>33</sup> Despite these instructions, ambiguous or misleading

30 For a complete list and detailed descriptions of questions on the 1901 nominal schedule, see Eric W. Sager, ed., *The National Sample of the 1901 Census of Canada User's Guide* (Victoria: Canadian Families Project, University of Victoria, 2002). The guide includes the 1901 *Instructions to [Census] Officers*.

31 *Census Manual* (1891), p. 6.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

33 For example, the term “mason” was not sufficiently precise. Enumerators were supposed to use more precise terms such as “brick mason” or “stone mason.” Similarly, the term “author” was too vague. Enumerators were supposed to indicate whether an author was an “editor, reporter, journalist, magazine writer, novelist or historian.” *Census Manual* (1891), pp. 14, 16.

occupational descriptions were recorded for prostitutes or “public women,” as they were primly called by some census officials. George Sargison, the chief census officer of British Columbia in 1891, remarked that “public women” often used the term “dressmaker” as an occupational disguise,<sup>34</sup> and so they did. Terms like “dressmaker” and “seamstress” were so widely deployed in the sex trade that “plain sewing” was used “as a euphemism for prostitution” in some places.<sup>35</sup> As will be seen presently, however, prostitutes in Victoria were recorded with other occupations on the census: as milliners, hairdressers, florists, musicians, actresses, dancers, and typewriters (typists), to name some of the occupations. Sex-trade workers in other parts of Canada were probably enumerated with similar substitute occupations or disguises. The challenge for historians is to see behind the disguises. It is easier to discern occupational camouflage if we have some local knowledge about the sex trade, and in Victoria the sites of sexual commerce are relatively well documented.

### **The Sex Trade in Victoria**

Victoria was founded as an outpost for the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1843. The community of a few hundred non-Native settlers languished until the late 1850s, when it was inundated with thousands of miners en route to the Fraser River gold fields on the mainland of British Columbia. Incorporated as a city in 1862, Victoria experienced another boom during the Cariboo gold rush. The Royal Navy base at nearby Esquimalt, and the hundreds of sailors stationed there, contributed to Victoria’s reputation as a roisterous seaport.<sup>36</sup> Not surprisingly, prostitution was part of the scene. During the colonial period, sexual commerce involved Aboriginal women who consorted with non-Native men in local dance halls. Government documents, missionary reports, and newspaper editorials contain many references to dance halls and prostitution involving Aboriginal women.<sup>37</sup> First Nations women were still involved

34 British Columbia Archives, Add. MSS. 2454, George A. Sargison letter-book. Sargison to J. S. Bennett, June 10, 1891, p. 176.

35 Joel Best, “Careers in Brothel Prostitution: St. Paul, 1865–1883,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 12, no. 4 (Spring 1982), p. 600. Many prostitutes from the United States worked in Victoria, and they may have brought the euphemism “dressmaker” with them. During this period, dressmakers and seamstresses were also associated with prostitution in England. See Christina Walkley, *The Ghost in the Looking Glass: The Victorian Seamstress* (London: Peter Owen, 1981), pp. 48–49, 81–90.

36 On the economic history of Victoria, see Charles N. Forward, “The Evolution of Victoria’s Functional Character” in Alan F. J. Artibise, ed., *Town and City: Aspects of Western Canadian Urban Development* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina Press, 1981); Peter A. Baskerville, *Beyond the Island: An Illustrated History of Victoria* (Burlington, ON: Windsor Publications, 1986).

37 Jean Barman, “Taming Aboriginal Sexuality: Gender, Power, and Race in British Columbia, 1850–1900,” *BC Studies*, no. 115/116 (1997/1998), pp. 243–244; Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire*.

in the sex trade in 1871, when British Columbia joined Confederation and Victoria became a provincial capital, but Aboriginal participation in the sex trade abated steadily over the next decade as a result of a complex series of circumstances whereby Aboriginal women were “deterred from relationships with white men.”<sup>38</sup> The characteristics of the sex trade changed in response to the changing character of the city. By 1891, Victoria had discarded vestiges of its frontier, fur-trade-post origins and emerged as a prosperous, modern North American city. The sex trade also shed its frontier character, as Aboriginal women were supplanted by non-Aboriginal women and as brothels, rather than dance halls, became sites of sexual commerce.

Sexual commerce in Victoria was located principally, but not exclusively, in three areas: around Broad Street in the commercial centre of the city; around the lower (western) end of Herald Street and Chatham Street in an industrial part of the city; and on Fisguard Street in Chinatown.<sup>39</sup> Prostitution on Fisguard Street was confined almost exclusively to the Chinese community, which was virtually closed to outsiders, including moral regulators like the police.<sup>40</sup> Since Fisguard Street was outside the

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*Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849–1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), pp. 110–123. The topic is also explored further by Perry in “Metropolitan Knowledge, Colonial Practice, and Indigenous Womanhood: Missions in Nineteenth-Century British Columbia” in Katie Pickles and Myra Rutherdale, eds., *Contact Zones: Aboriginal & Settler Women in Canada’s Colonial Past* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005), pp. 109–130.

38 Jay Nelson, “‘A Strange Revolution in the Manners of the Country’: Aboriginal-Settler Inter-marriage in Nineteenth Century British Columbia” in John McLaren, Robert Menzies, and Dorthoy E. Chunn, eds., *Regulating Lives: Historical Essays on the State, Society, the Individual, and the Law* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2002). As Nelson notes, in the closing decades of the nineteenth century “Aboriginal women were increasingly deterred from relationships with white men by policies implemented by a shifting alliance of missionaries, local Aboriginal men, and Indian agents” (p. 46). See also Jean Barman, “Aboriginal Women on the Streets of Victoria: Rethinking Transgressive Sexuality during the Colonial Encounter” in Pickles and Rutherdale, eds., *Contact Zones*, pp. 205–227; Renisa Mawani, “Legal Geographies of Aboriginal Segregation in British Columbia: The Making and Unmaking of the Songhees Reserve, 1850–1911” in Carolyn Strange and Alison Basher, eds., *Isolation. Places and Practices of Exclusion* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 173–190.

39 C. L. Hansen-Brett, “Ladies in Scarlet: An Historical Overview of Prostitution in Victoria, British Columbia, 1870–1939,” *British Columbia Historical News*, vol. 19 (1986), p. 22; Harry Gregson, *A History of Victoria, 1842–1970* (Victoria: Observer Publishing, 1970), p. 126.

40 Although Victoria city police occasionally raided gambling dens in the city’s Chinese quarter, rarely did they arrest anyone on charges connected with the sex trade. John McLaren has concluded that “Chinese sexual vice does not appear to have been a police concern or priority” in Victoria during this period. See John McLaren, “Race and the Criminal Justice System in British Columbia, 1892–1920: Constructing Chinese Crimes” in G. Blaine Baker and Jim Phillips, eds., *Essays in the History of Canadian Law, Volume III, in Honour of R. C. B. Risk* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, for The Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History, 1999), p. 422. On the history and character of this community, see David Chueyan Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns*

mainstream of sexual commerce, it is not considered here. Instead, we focus on the denizens of Victoria's better-known and more accessible red-light districts, starting with Broad Street.

Broad Street is only a few blocks long. In the late 1800s, it appeared to be a respectable thoroughfare: a Methodist Church anchored one end of the street and Victoria's most prestigious hotel, The Driard, anchored the other. The exclusive Union Club, social headquarters of Victoria's patriarchy, was located nearby, and City Hall was just around the corner. The tax assessments on properties along Broad Street were among the highest in the city.<sup>41</sup> Amidst the prosperous and respectable properties of Broad Street, however, were disreputable sites: in 1886, Victoria's chief of police identified seven brothels on Broad Street.<sup>42</sup> By 1891, the sex trade in this part of the city had expanded, as brothels were then operating on nearby Broughton Street, Kane Street (now an extension of Broughton Street), Courtenay Street, and View Street. Although the area was well established as a centre of sexual commerce, this was a *sub rosa* community: We know very little about the sex workers who lived here, but occasionally we catch a glimpse of the women from police registers, court records, newspaper reports, and city directories. When these documentary fragments can be connected, and when they intersect with census records, a picture of the *demi-monde* begins to emerge.

Fortunately for the historian, several instances of documentary congruence occur in 1891. One such occurrence involves Helen Dewsup, listed at 47 Broad Street in the 1891 Victoria check census and the 1892 directory. In the 1891 Dominion census, she was enumerated as a "boarding house keeper." A few months after the census was taken, Dewsup (also spelled Dessup) was charged and convicted for "keeping a bawdy house or house of ill fame."<sup>43</sup> Hattie Spaulding, who lived at 49 Broad Street according to the directory, was also charged in 1891 for "keeping a bawdy house or house of ill fame." Spaulding had a long record of morals-related offences

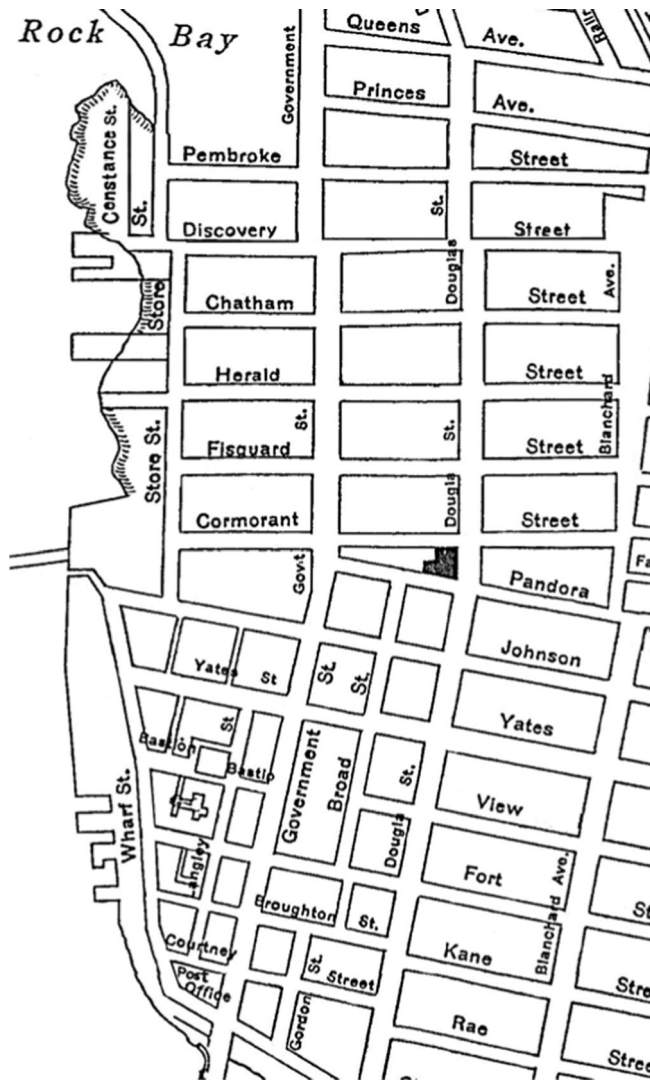
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*within Cities in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1988). Prostitution in Victoria's Chinatown is discussed in Tamara Adilman, "A Preliminary Sketch of Chinese Women and Work in British Columbia, 1858–1950" in Gillian Creese and Veronica Strong-Boag, eds., *British Columbia Reconsidered: Essays on Women* (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1992).

41 P. D. Floyd, "The Human Geography of Southeastern Vancouver Island, 1842–1891" (MA thesis, Geography, University of Victoria, 1969), p. 172. Using city tax records, Floyd determined that the assessed value of properties on Broad Street was the second highest in the city. Only properties fronting Government Street were more valuable.

42 City of Victoria Archives [hereafter CVA], Report of Charles Bloomfield, Chief of Police, to D. W. Higgins, chair, Victoria Police Committee, April 7, 1886.

43 Victoria Police Archives [hereafter VPA]. Police Charge Book (1889–1902), August 4, 1891, p. 269. Years later, Helen Dessup was fined for keeping "a house of prostitution" in Nanaimo, 90 kilometers north of Victoria. ("City Police Court," Nanaimo *Free Press*, August 18, 1898).



**Figure 1:** Victoria, British Columbia, c. 1901, showing the downtown core and City Hall

in Victoria.<sup>44</sup> In the 1891 census, she was identified as a “seamstress.” At 56 Broad Street, the enumerator recorded a household headed by Bertha

<sup>44</sup> In 1889, Spaulding’s Broad Street residence was raided by police, and she was charged with keeping a common bawdy house. See *Victoria Daily Colonist*, January 1, 1889 and *Victoria Daily Colonist*, January 12, 1889.

Baker, a “florist.” This was also a brothel.<sup>45</sup> Alice Seymour’s house at 11 Kane Street was located nearby. A few weeks prior to the census, Seymour had been convicted for “keeping a bawdy house.”<sup>46</sup>

In 1891, this part of Victoria lay within census sub-district No. 5, Yates Street Ward. Had the enumerator followed instructions in the official 1891 census *Manual* to the letter, he would have been familiar beforehand with “the conditions of every family in his sub-district.”<sup>47</sup> Maybe he did not reconnoitre the district before the census got underway. Maybe he was not a worldly man. Even so, he must have been aware that he was dealing with the *demi-monde* when he visited the households of Mesdames Baker, Dewsup, Seymour, Spaulding, and others. First of all, he might have been struck by the size of their premises. Most of these places contained half a dozen separate rooms or apartments.<sup>48</sup> He might also have been struck by the age of the female residents and their origins. Most of the women were relatively young, and nearly all had been born in the United States.

Ten years later, Broad Street was still the nexus of Victoria’s sex trade. In fact, by 1901 Broad Street had become a prestigious address for brothel owners who occupied the upper echelons of the sex trade. One of the city’s most flamboyant madams, Stella Carroll, was located here.<sup>49</sup> Other brothels were located close by. These included 14 Courtney Street, run by Jenny Morris (also called Jennie Mores); Fay Williams’ brothel at 14 Broughton Street; and Fay Watson’s brothel house at 14 Douglas Street.<sup>50</sup>

In the 1901 census this area lay within the city’s Central Ward and was part of census district 4, sub-divisions 6, 7, and 8. Again, we cannot know whether the enumerators had reconnoitred their census sub-districts beforehand or whether they were men of the world. However, they must have known they were dealing with the *demi-monde* when they enumerated households like the one headed by Stella Carroll at 60½ Broad

45 Bertha Baker was well established in the sex trade when she was enumerated in 1891. She had been charged with keeping a bawdy house five years earlier, in 1886. The following year, she was charged with keeping a house of ill fame. See *Victoria Daily Colonist*, December 2, 1886 and *Victoria Daily Colonist*, December 9, 1887.

46 VPA. Police Charge Book (1889–1902), pp. 53–55.

47 *Census Manual* (1891), p. 7.

48 The size of the brothels is evident from columns 3 and 4 on Schedule 1 of the manuscript census. For example, Fay Williams (census family #64) occupied a two-storey brick structure containing eight rooms; Bertha Baker (census family #92) occupied a one-storey wooden structure containing seven rooms; Alice Seymour (census family #108) occupied a two-storey wooden structure containing eleven rooms. LAC, microfilm reel T6292, Victoria City, Division 5 (Yates Street Ward), pp. 13–25.

49 On Carroll’s career, see Linda J. Eversole, *Stella: Unrepentant Madam* (Victoria: Touchwood Editions, 2005).

50 Brothel operators Seymour, Morris, and Watson are mentioned in Valerie Green’s gossip history, *Upstarts and Outcasts*, p. 116.



Street. The residents of the sumptuously furnished, lavishly decorated apartments were all American-born women between the ages of 18 and 32 years. Carroll identified herself as a landlady; her lodgers identified themselves as dressmakers, typewriters, singers, milliners, and actresses.<sup>51</sup>

Traditionally, sex trade workers — along with gamblers, bookies and other marginal members of the labour force — are associated with the so-called invisible or non-market economy.<sup>52</sup> However, if we use the nominal census schedules as a lens, the sex trade looks very much like other activities associated with the formal economy. For example, on the 1891 census Broad Street brothel-keeper Helen Dewsup identified herself as an employer and indicated she employed two hired “hands” in her workplace. Likewise, Alice Seymour identified herself as an employer and indicated she paid the wages of two “hands” in her establishment on Kane Street.<sup>53</sup>

A decade later, Seymour was again identified as an employer who relied on her “own means” for her income. In the 1901 census, the term “own means” was entered for “persons who do not carry on any remunerative calling and live on their own means, as from incomes, superannuations, annuities, pensions, etc.”<sup>54</sup> Seymour did not reveal her income to the enumerator. However, several of her lodgers obligingly declared earnings from their “occupation or trade” on the census.<sup>55</sup> If the information they provided was accurate, their earnings were substantial. A couple of her lodgers — a 25-year-old “dressmaker” and a 21-year-old “actress” — claimed annual earnings of \$1,000 each. Women in other brothels reported comparable earnings. A “dressmaker” enumerated in

51 Photographs showing the interior of Carroll’s brothel are included in Eversole, *Stella: Unrepentant Madam*, p. 70.

52 The issue of women’s non-market work is discussed in Elizabeth Herr, “The Census, Estimation Biases, and Female Labor-Force Participation Rates in 1880 Colorado,” *Historical Methods*, vol. 28, no. 4 (Fall 1995), pp. 167–181. The author includes prostitutes in her discussion.

53 Dewsup and Seymour were probably referring to the cooks and domestic servants they employed in their brothels, not to the prostitutes who worked on their premises, when they reported the number of “hands” they employed. The prostitutes who lived on their premises may have paid a portion of their earnings as rent and so were classified as “lodgers” rather than “employees.” Stella Carroll operated her brothel in this way, on “a boarding house basis.” According to her biographer, “the girls would rent a room in the brothel and keep their earnings while Stella would make money from food and liquor sales and rent” (Eversole, *Stella: Unrepentant Madam*, p. 71).

54 Canada, Department of Agriculture. *Instructions to Officers [for] the Fourth Census of the Dominion (1901)*, p. xix, item 59, reprinted in Sager, ed., *National Sample of the 1901 Census of Canada*, p. 27.

55 In the 1901 census, the enumerators’ manual stated: “For census purposes the terms salary and wages have a common meaning, being the amount or sum of money which one person employed by another receives for his service, whether the work done be professional, literary or handicraft” (*Instructions to Officers*, p. xx, reprinted in Sager, ed., *National Sample of the 1901 Census of Canada*, p. 195).

Stella Carroll's household reported an annual income of \$800, while her housemate, a 23-year-old "milliner," declared annual earnings of \$1,000.<sup>56</sup>

To put these claims in perspective, on average women employed in non-professional, non-managerial positions in Canada only earned about \$200 a year in 1901.<sup>57</sup> Wages in British Columbia were generally higher than the national average, but not substantially so. According to a provincial government handbook prepared in 1902, white domestic servants in Victoria earned between \$180 and \$240 a year; white women employed in merchant tailoring establishments received an average wage of \$288 per year, while typists and stenographers earned about \$300 a year.<sup>58</sup> Professional women such as school principals earned more than clerical workers, but they still earned less than the young women who lived with Seymour and Carroll.<sup>59</sup>

Women in the Kane Street and Broad Street brothels might have exaggerated their earnings to inflate their status, but undoubtedly they earned more than most female workers, including the female sex-trade workers who lived half a mile away on Herald Street, close to the harbour. The lower end of Herald Street was very different from Broad Street. It was separated from the commercial and ostensibly respectable part of Victoria by the city's Chinatown. It was located in an area dominated by a gas works, breweries, iron foundries, lumber mills, and warehouses. Whaling boats, sealing schooners, and clipper ships docked here. Hotels that provided inexpensive lodging for sailors and transient labourers were located in this part of town.

The lower end of Herald Street lay within census sub-district No. 2, Johnson Street Ward, in 1891. A couple of brothels were operating here when the census was taken in April that year. They were located in a newly built, two-storey brick building at 25–27 Herald Street.<sup>60</sup> This part of Victoria underwent a dramatic transformation during the Klondike gold rush (1898–1900) when thousands of men passed through the city en route to Dawson City and the gold fields. When the city's inexpensive hotels and rooming houses were filled to capacity, gold-seekers established

56 LAC, Fourth Census of Canada, 1901, microfilm reel T6429, Victoria City, District 4, sub-district 6, p. 22, and sub-district 7, p. 30.

57 Baskerville and Sager, *Unwilling Idlers*, pp. 130, 205.

58 R. E. Gosnell, *The Year Book of British Columbia and Manual of Provincial Information* (Victoria: Government Printer, 1903), p. 335.

59 In Victoria, the most highly-qualified female school teachers earned about \$600 per year. Victoria School Board, *Annual Report of the Public Schools of the City of Victoria* (Victoria: Board of School Trustees, 1899), pp. 20–21. See also Eric W. Sager, "Women Teachers in Canada, 1881–1901: Revisiting the 'Feminization' of an Occupation," *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 88, no. 2 (June 2007), pp. 228–231.

60 The brothels included apartments occupied by 26-year-old Ada Gault and 22-year-old Annie Howard (census sub-division 4–B, families 225 and 226). The enumerator for this district, B. W. Ward, has not been located on the census.

temporary encampments on wastelands close to the harbour. Not surprisingly, the sex trade burgeoned, as scores of prostitutes moved into the area. The newcomers did not reside in substantial brick structures; rather, the prostitutes who came to this corner of Victoria during the Klondike gold rush worked and lived in hastily built, one-room wooden cabins known as cribs. The lower end of Chatham Street, located one block to the north of Herald Street, was soon crowded with cribs.

In 1901, this part of Victoria was located within census sub-district No. 14, North Ward. The nominal census records for residents in this part of the city are revealing in several respects. Nearly every female resident on the lower end of Chatham Street was identified as a “head of household” on the census schedule. From this information we can infer that most of these women occupied a physical space (a crib) by themselves, unlike the brothel prostitutes who resided in larger census households. The records also invite comment because of information they do not provide. Unlike residents in city centre brothels, women in this part of town did not identify themselves as dressmakers, milliners, or actresses. No information was entered in the column devoted to “profession, occupation, trade or means of living” beside their names on the nominal census schedules. Moreover, none of the women on Chatham Street offered any information about their income. Rather, the enumerator has noted simply that the respondents supported themselves by their “own means” or on their “own account.” Those terms were used by the enumerators to denote “persons employed in gainful work, doing their own work.”<sup>61</sup> When they were visited by the enumerator, many of these women were probably doing their own work as part of the sex trade. As ever, some of the evidence is circumstantial, but some is compelling. According to Victoria City police records covering the period December 1900 to September 1901, nearly a dozen of the women enumerated in sub-district 14 had been, or would be, charged with offences relating to prostitution.<sup>62</sup>

Women who worked in the cribs on Chatham Street were considered to be socially inferior to women who worked in the so-called “carriage trade” houses around Broad Street.<sup>63</sup> Police records and newspaper reports indicate that women on Chatham Street were more likely to be involved in

61 Sager, ed., *National Sample of the 1901 Census of Canada*, p. 28.

62 The following women, who were enumerated in North Ward, sub district 14, were fined \$50 each for being inmates of bawdy houses on various occasions between December 1900 and September 1901: Marie Dupont, Isabelle Rafichard, Minnie Williams, Susan Roberts, Marie Burman, Nellie Wood, and Georgee Scudder. During the same period, Nellie Earle and Eva Showers were fined \$90 for “keeping” bawdy houses (CVA, Victoria Police Magistrates’ record book, CB 16B5, vol. 2, *passim*). All of these women were enumerated in the 1901 census.

63 Hansen Brett, “Ladies in Scarlet,” p. 22.

affrays and altercations involving alcohol and violence.<sup>64</sup> In many respects, this was a precarious place, and on a hot summer day in 1907 the entire area was destroyed by fire.<sup>65</sup> Fortunately, there were no deaths or injuries in the conflagration. However, the sex trade in Victoria was never the same after the fire of 1907.

The fire alone did not affect the character of the sex trade. The change was partly due to the social purity movement, which made inroads in many North American cities during the Edwardian years.<sup>66</sup> By 1906 the social purity crusade had gained considerable momentum in Victoria, as organizations like the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and reform-minded city councillors embarked on a campaign to curtail the sex trade. Ultimately, they wanted to eradicate the trade, but in the interim they sought to eliminate brothels from the city centre and restrict the red-light district to the western end of Chatham Street and a single block on Herald Street.<sup>67</sup> In 1907, the Victoria Police Commission proscribed those two city blocks as a restricted district. Most of the brothels outside the district were compelled to close. Further restrictions were introduced in 1910, when Herald Street was removed from the restricted zone and efforts were made to confine brothels and cribs to the 500 block of Chatham Street. Moreover, during this period civic officials and members of the local chamber of commerce were making a concerted effort to promote Victoria as a genteel haven for retirees and an attractive destination for tourists.<sup>68</sup> Sex-trade workers came to be seen as nettles in the city of gardens. Thus, while the fire of 1907 and new regulations facilitated the social purity crusade in Victoria, the moral and economic climate of the city was already changing in ways not conducive to the sex trade.

### Documentation and Charade

The nominal census records examined in this study coincide with the apogee of the sex trade in Victoria. The records are compelling because they provide traces of transient and marginalized workers who are not

64 Police charge books frequently noted affrays in this part of Victoria. For example, on October 25, 1901, two "French" prostitutes, Jenny LeRoy and Virginie Dauzo, were arrested for "fighting." The police records also note that many of the women who were arrested were "immoderate" in their consumption of alcohol (VPA, Police charge book, 1889–1902, p. 209; VCA, Victoria Police Magistrates' record book, CB 16B5, vol. 2, p. 90).

65 *Victoria Daily Colonist*, July 23, 1907.

66 See Carolyn Strange and Tina Loo, *Law and Moral Regulation in Canada, 1867–1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water*.

67 Evidence of the social purity campaign in Victoria can be seen in local newspapers and reports of city council debates. See the *Victoria Daily Colonist*, July 25, 1907 and *Victoria Daily Times*, April 15, 1908.

68 Kenneth Lines, "A Bit of Old England: The Selling of Tourist Victoria" (MA thesis, History, University of Victoria, 1972); Michael Dawson, *Selling British Columbia. Tourism and Consumer Culture, 1890–1970* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004), pp. 15–37.

well documented elsewhere, and because they provide details of a community that had largely disappeared by the end of the Edwardian era. True, we are only seeing a portion of the community through the lens of census records. Because the census of Canada was conducted on *de jure* principles, persons who were not deemed to be permanent residents of Victoria in accordance with the *Census Act* were not enumerated. The precise number of sojourner sex-trade workers is difficult to determine, but in 1900 Victoria's chief of police estimated that over 200 "known prostitutes" were working in the city.<sup>69</sup> Only a portion of them are identifiable on the census. Nevertheless, our case count is significant. For 1891, we have information on two dozen sex-trade workers; we can identify nearly 70 sex-trade workers on the 1901 census. The case count is large enough to suggest a prosopographical profile of female sex workers and shed some light on the *demi-monde* in Victoria during this period.

One of the most striking things about the tenderloin of Victoria is the prominence of American-born women. In 1891, over 80 per cent of sex-trade workers identified on the census reported the United States as their place of birth, a figure congruent with police department statistics.<sup>70</sup> This figure might be compared with the American component in the larger cohort of Victoria's female population between 20 and 30 years of age. In that cohort, only 12 per cent were born in the United States.<sup>71</sup> A decade later, American-born women still dominated the *demi-monde*. Among the sex-trade workers identified in Victoria brothels on the 1901 census, 80 per cent were from the United States. In the larger cohort of women between the ages of 20 and 30 years in Victoria in 1901, American-born residents comprised only 13 per cent of the population.<sup>72</sup>

The mean age of brothel prostitutes in 1891 was 24 years; the median age was 25 years. Brothel-keepers were slightly older, with a mean age of 29. Ten years later, the age difference between brothel prostitutes and brothel-keepers was greater. In 1901, the median age of brothel prostitutes was 21 while the median age of brothel keepers was 31. The increase in the age difference is due to the fact that brothel prostitutes in 1901 included some very young females, while there were no teenagers in the sorority

69 British Columbia Archives. GR 784, British Columbia. Commission on Victoria Police Commissioners (1910), p. 12.

70 During this period, over 80 per cent of the women recorded as prostitutes in Victoria police department charge books gave the United States as their place of birth. VPA, Police Charge Book (1889–1902).

71 Information on the larger cohort is derived from statistical queries on 1891 census data. In 1891, N = 1,860 (females between 20 and 30 years of age in Victoria). Of that number, 230 (12 per cent) were born in the United States.

72 Information on the proportion of American-born women is derived from statistical queries on 1901 census data. In 1901, N = 2,719 (females between 20 and 30 years of age in Victoria). Of that number, 344 (13 per cent) were born in the United States.

of 1891. The age difference also reflects the fact that brothel owners like Alice Seymour were ten years older.

Demographic data from the census raise some interesting questions about the marital status of sex-trade workers. The data contradict the traditional view that prostitutes were societal rebels who disdained the conventional ties of marriage. In 1891, among the cohort of women who managed and worked in Victoria brothels, nearly two-thirds (15 out of 24) reported that they were married. The other women in the cohort were single. The ratio of married to unmarried female sex-trade workers in Victoria is relatively high compared to data from other communities. In her study of prostitution in Nevada in the 1880s, Marion Goldman found that less than half of Comstock prostitutes had been married. However, as Goldman suggests, in many cases the marital status of sex-trade workers was not indicative of conjugal conditions. "Most of those who were married no longer lived with their husbands, and they had simply ignored complicated divorce procedures."<sup>73</sup> None of the married women who resided in Victoria brothels in 1891 were living with their husbands. Indeed, males are notably absent from the nominal records of census households that functioned as brothels in 1891. Similarly, with the exception of male Chinese cooks and servants, males do not appear in the census returns of Victoria brothels in 1901.<sup>74</sup> The marital profile of female residents, however, had changed. Among the cohort of women who operated and worked in brothels, nearly 80 per cent (29 out of 37) were single. Three women were divorced, and three women were widows; only two women were married.

The demography of the cribs on Chatham Street in 1901 was different again. The women who occupied the cribs were generally older than the women who resided in brothels. Although the mean age was 24, the median age was 28. Over one-third of crib prostitutes (38 per cent) were 30 years of age and older. With regard to their marital status, all of the women indicated that they were single. Forty per cent of the crib prostitutes had been born in the United States, but 45 per cent had been born in France and the French-speaking region of Belgium. With women from Germany and Russia, this was a very cosmopolitan corner of Victoria. Its cosmopolitan character was also evident in the American-born contingent, which included African American women.<sup>75</sup>

73 Goldman, *Gold Diggers & Silver Miners*, p. 71.

74 In 1901, Hattie Wickwire employed a 22-year-old Chinese cook, identified as Jim, in her brothel at 60 Broad Street. According to the census, he earned \$300 a year. Alexina Ballinger, who ran a brothel at 54 Broad Street, employed a 36-year-old male Chinese domestic servant, Fun Lee. He earned \$250 a year.

75 LAC, Fourth Census of Canada, 1901, microfilm reel T6430, Victoria City, District 4, sub-district 14, pp. 16–18.

The women enumerated in cribs on lower Chatham Street may have been part of a larger community described by Ronald Hyam in his book *Empire and Sexuality*. He discusses an international sorority of sex-trade workers who “moved around the globe to take advantage of labour opportunities caused by gold rushes and similar phenomenon” in the late Victorian and Edwardian years. Hyam describes these sojourner sex trade workers as “peripatetic prostitutes.”<sup>76</sup> Some of the sex-trade workers enumerated in Victoria may once have been part of that group, since most were newly arrived when the census was taken. In fact, all of the women identified as sex-trade workers on Chatham Street arrived in Canada between 1899 and 1901, according to the census.<sup>77</sup> Some of the women may have worked previously in the mining towns in the Kootenay district of British Columbia; the cities of Nelson and Rossland both had well-defined red-light districts that offered opportunities to “transient prostitutes.”<sup>78</sup> Undoubtedly some of the women may have worked in the Yukon before coming to Victoria, because their demographic profile fits that of sex-trade workers in Dawson City during the Klondike Gold Rush. In her study of community in the Klondike, Charlene Porsild found that over half of the prostitutes in Dawson City were European born, nearly one-third of them in France or Belgium.<sup>79</sup>

As Mary Murphy noted in a study of the sex trade in *fin-de-siècle* Butte, Montana: “Prostitution [was] a highly stratified occupation. Each woman’s status was determined by a combination of race, ethnicity, education, sociability, and sexual skill and was reflected in the place she worked.”<sup>80</sup> It would be helpful to know more about the dynamics of the *demi-monde* in Victoria. How was it constructed and stratified? Who gained entry to the upper echelons, and who was consigned to the lower echelons of the sex trade in the city? These interesting questions must await another

76 Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), p. 148.

77 LAC, Fourth Census of Canada, 1901, microfilm reel T6429, Victoria City, District 4, sub-district 14, p. 16.

78 Charleen Smith provides a remarkably detailed account of the sex trade in the Kootenay in her essay, “Boomtown Brothels in the Kootenays, 1895–1905.” The largest group of sex-trade workers in that region, she notes, were “transient prostitutes.” These women are “also the most difficult to discuss with any degree of certainty because of the very nature of their movement in and out of towns throughout British Columbia. Frequently appearing in police records only once or twice and then dropping out of sight altogether, we can only speculate about their lives on the road” (pp. 136–137).

79 Charlene Porsild, *Gamblers and Dreamers: Women, Men, and Community in the Klondike* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1998), p. 124. For another study that has utilized census data and court records, see Bay Riley, *Gold Diggers of the Klondike: Prostitution in Dawson City, Yukon, 1891–1908* (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer, 1997).

80 Mary Murphy, “The Private Lives of Public Women: Prostitution in Butte, Montana, 1878–1917” in Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson, eds., *The Women’s West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), p. 194.

study, as ours concerns the character of census records relating to sex-trade workers, not the character of the trade itself.

What are we to make of these records? Are they reliable, are they veracious? If brothel-keepers and prostitutes in Victoria were enumerated with misleading or fanciful occupations, can we trust any of the information they provided? Can we be sure about their names, ages, places of birth? It is impossible to provide an unequivocal answer to these questions, but some general remarks might be offered. On the matter of names, it is likely that some women — especially women called Kitty, Flossie, Trixie, and Loo — offered nicknames or pet names to the enumerator. Some women may have used aliases. It is also likely that some women provided misleading information about their ages or dates of birth. The allure of youth was an important part of their trade, and we might expect women to have represented themselves as being younger than they actually were.<sup>81</sup> We might also expect them to exoticize their backgrounds by claiming to be from France. In the American West, French prostitutes “had a special reputation for mysterious fast living that added to their allure.”<sup>82</sup> Some of the prostitutes on Chatham Street may have been trading on that reputation.

That being said, many indicators suggest that personal information was in the main accurate. Police charge books and newspaper reports often refer to “French prostitutes” on Chatham Street, and there is good reason to suppose that women who said they were from France had in fact been born there.<sup>83</sup> Since several women in the Chatham Street quarter indicated that French was their mother tongue, we can assume that they were telling the truth about their origins. Likewise, women who claimed to be from the United States appear to be genuine. Stella Carroll’s biographer has corroborated personal information that the well-known, American-born madam provided to the enumerator in

81 Butler has noted that, in the American West, prostitutes sometimes gave “sketchy responses to census enumerators” when asked for their age. “Age was a particularly sensitive manner in a profession where physical appeal supposedly counted for everything” (Butler, *Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery*, p. 15).

82 Goldman, *Gold Diggers & Silver Miners*, p. 67. Jacqueline Baker Barnhart concurs with this assessment in *The Fair But Frail: Prostitution in San Francisco, 1849-1900* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1986). In California, she says, “French prostitutes demanded and received greater respect, admiration, and fees” than any other sex-trade workers. “French prostitutes maintained this position throughout the nineteenth century. The most derogatory adjective ascribed to a French prostitute was that she was notorious” (Barnhart, *The Fair But Frail*, pp. 50–53).

83 See, for example, *Victoria Daily Colonist*, February 21, 1903, which reported on a complex case involving three French prostitutes who had been working in a house on Herald Street. Because the house was disorderly, the women were ordered to leave Victoria. They went to Seattle, but were subsequently deported back to Victoria, on the grounds that they had entered the United States for immoral purposes. See also note 64, above, for additional references to “French” prostitutes in this part of Victoria.



1901. Carroll's place and date of birth, her family background, and other information recorded in the census are accurate.<sup>84</sup> The data are consistent for other women identified with the sex trade, who appear in both the 1891 and the 1901 census. Alice Seymour was noted as 29 years old in the 1891 census and 39 in the 1901 census. Her religion (Roman Catholic), place of birth (USA), and family origins (Germany) are consistent in both censuses. Personal information for another brothel-keeper, Jennie Morris, is similarly consistent across the two censuses. She was recorded as 25 years old in the 1891 census and as 35 years old in the 1901 census.<sup>85</sup> Police records also corroborate census records, albeit with minor discrepancies. Thus we find Matty Smith in the 1891 census and Mattie Smith in police charge books; Hattie Spaulding in the census and Hettie Spaulding in the police blotter.<sup>86</sup>

It would appear, then, that sex-trade workers in Victoria cooperated with enumerators; there is no evidence in the records of census officials to indicate otherwise.<sup>87</sup> Of course, it was expedient for sex-trade workers to be cooperative, simply because individuals who refused to participate in the census could be prosecuted and fined under the provisions of the *Census Act*. On the other hand, some of the women may have participated in the census as a means of affirming their place in the community. This may help to explain why sex-trade workers came forward when the *Victoria Daily Colonist* asked for the names of householders who had been overlooked in the official census of 1891. When the newspaper declared that residents had a civic duty to participate in the check census, members of the *demi-monde* responded to the call. Civic-minded madams taking part in the Victoria check census included Della Wentworth, who operated a brothel at 14 Broughton Street, and Therese Bernstein, who owned a brothel at 19 Courtney Street.<sup>88</sup>

The unabashed nature of prostitution in Victoria and the general acceptance of the sex workers may explain their presence in local directories. As noted earlier, the directories printed the names and addresses of many

84 Stella Carroll's actual name was Estella Carroll, but she was universally known as Stella. I am grateful to Linda Eversole for allowing me to read a pre-publication copy of her biography, *Stella: Unrepentant Madam*, and for confirming details about some of the women in Stella's sorority.

85 LAC, Third Census of Canada, microfilm reel T6292, Victoria City, District 4, sub-district 4 c-1, pp. 25, 30; Fourth Census of Canada, microfilm reel T6429, Victoria City, District 4, sub-district 6, pp. 27-28.

86 LAC, Third Census of Canada, microfilm reel T6292, Victoria City, District 4, sub-district 4 c-1, p. 25; VCA, Police Magistrate's Book, 1888-1891, p. 269.

87 In 1891, the chief census officer noted that some of Victoria's Chinese residents were not forthcoming. Since the government had recently introduced a head tax on Chinese immigrants, this is not surprising. In some parts of the province, census officials struggled to win the trust of Aboriginal people. But there is no evidence that sex-trade workers were obdurate (Dunae, "Making the 1891 Census in British Columbia," p. 232).

88 British Columbia Archives, Add. MSS 1908, Census of Victoria [1891], microfilm reel A-1356.

women who were engaged in the sex trade. The directories did not assign any occupation to these women; to some degree, then, even these texts were encoded. Presumably, though, contemporaries knew how to read the code. Members of the so-called sporting set would know how to interpret a listing in the 1892 directory that read simply: "Miss Dewsup, 47 Broad Street." Similarly, the *cognoscenti* could draw inferences from a seemingly nondescript entry in the 1902 city directory that read: "Flossie Raymond, 9 Chatham Street."<sup>89</sup> The men enrolled as enumerators probably knew how to interpret these entries and decipher their codes, especially after they had called on the addresses and interviewed the occupants.

Who were these men? Ostensibly, any adult male who was a British subject could be hired as an enumerator, although in practice census-making often involved a degree of patronage. Applicants who were recommended by local officials or community leaders, such as magistrates or city councillors, were invariably appointed over applicants who did not have such mentors. In many jurisdictions, men of a "clerkly disposition" were regarded as being ideally suited for census field work.<sup>90</sup> In Victoria, several enumerators were in fact clerks. Frank Stannard, a 23-year-old office clerk, enumerated Victoria's downtown brothels in 1891. Stannard was a bachelor who roomed with a widow and her family in the respectable neighbourhood of James Bay. In 1901, the brothels identified in this study were enumerated by three men: Irving Lemm, who was responsible for census sub-division 6; Louis Watson, the enumerator for census sub-division 7; and Herbert Winsby, the census-taker for sub-division 8. Lemm was a 46-year-old salesman; he was married and lived with his wife and eight children in a large house on the eastern (residential) end of Johnson Street. Watson was a 49-year-old goods agent; he was married, had recently emigrated from England, and lived in the Clarence Hotel in the city centre. Winsby was a 23-year-old clerk employed by the Dominion Express Company. He was unmarried and lived with his family on Stanley Avenue, near Victoria High School. Since his father was the city tax collector and his brothers were bank clerks, Winsby may well have had a "clerkly disposition." Robert Houston, a 45-year-old journalist, enumerated the crib prostitutes on Chatham Street. A bachelor, Houston lived in "Roccabella," the city's premier boarding house, on Victoria Crescent, close to the Anglican cathedral.<sup>91</sup>

89 The entry for Dewsup appears on p. 434 of *Williams' Victoria Directory* (1892). As noted earlier, the directory was compiled in September 1891 and published in December that year. The entry for Flossie Raymond appears on p. 810 of *Henderson's City of Victoria Directory* (1902). The directories are available in a searchable PDF format at the *viHistory.ca* website.

90 Dunae, "Making the 1891 Census in British Columbia," p. 230.

91 Enumerators are identified on manuscript census schedules. Information about the enumerators is derived from the census schedules and Victoria city directories.

These enumerators did not leave diaries or journals, and we can only imagine how they felt when they interviewed women in brothels and cribs. The Dominion government placed great confidence in these men and expected them to maintain high moral standards when they carried out their “solemn inquest of the nation.”<sup>92</sup> Enumerators were supposed to be purposeful but tactful when they interviewed residents, and accurate and painstaking in their record-keeping. They were also supposed to be vigilant and astute. The official *Manual* for the 1891 census described the ideal enumerator as “an intelligent and conscientious officer, not a mere machine,” whose primary duty was “to guard himself and all concerned against errors and frauds.”<sup>93</sup> Clearly, though, there was a fraudulent aspect to their work; despite the high moral tone sounded in the official manuals, the census of the *demi-monde* — at least in Victoria — was a charade. How else can we characterize a process whereby enumerators knowingly described brothel operators as boarding house keepers and prostitutes as dressmakers, nurses, and florists?

The enumerators were not the only persons complicit in the charade. Having completed their census schedules, enumerators were required to submit their portfolios to a census commissioner. These officials coordinated and supervised the work of enumerators in the field. The census commissioner was supposed to review the enumerators’ returns and check the nominal schedules, line by line, for accuracy. In 1891, the census commissioner for the city of Victoria was John B. Lovell, a longtime resident and alderman who represented Yates Street Ward on Victoria City Council. Lovell would have been very familiar with residents in his ward, including residents in census households around Broad Street. Lovell’s superior was George Sargison, the chief census officer for the province of British Columbia. He, too, would have been familiar with the denizens of this part of town. An accountant by profession, Sargison worked in an office on Langley Street, literally around the corner from some of Victoria’s most prominent brothels.

Likewise, the senior officials who oversaw the 1901 census of Victoria must have been aware of the charade. William Dalby, a long-established real estate agent, served as Victoria’s census commissioner for the fourth decennial census. From his office on Yates Street in the centre of the city, he reviewed and approved schedules submitted by his enumerators. Dalby then passed the schedules on to his superior, Robert Drury, the chief census officer for the province of British Columbia. Drury was a prominent insurance agent in Victoria. His office was located on

92 This lofty phrase was used by the Dominion government to describe the 1891 census (*Statistical Year-Book of Canada for 1895*, p. 156).

93 *Census Manual* (1891), p. 7.

Broad Street, only a few doors away from some of Victoria's best-known brothels.<sup>94</sup>

Clearly, everyone — from enumerators in the field to census commissioners and chief census officers — knew that some of the information they had recorded, notably information relating to the occupations of sex-trade workers, was inaccurate and misleading. Why, then, did they agree to the charade? Local census officials may have been diffident or circumspect. Possibly they were too embarrassed to challenge the veracity of information they received from, say, Stella Carroll's female lodgers on Broad Street. Possibly they were too prudish to ask women on Chatham Street to elaborate on their work. As Bettina Bradbury has noted, enumerators sometimes found themselves in awkward circumstances in which they were reluctant to probe into the personal relations of the people they were enumerating. "Some questions were better not asked, some answers better not given."<sup>95</sup>

There may be other reasons why enumerators agreed to the charade, some of which are suggested by the characteristics of the term in question. Charade is a word that has many connotations, that can be defined and construed in different ways. However, one of the definitions provided by the *Oxford Dictionary* offers a good description of the kind of charade documented in this study. A "charade," according to this definition, is "an absurd pretense designed to create a pleasant or respectable appearance."<sup>96</sup> In the case of Victoria, census officials were obviously determined to maintain an edifice of respectability. The census commissioners appointed for Victoria were prominent members of the community: Lovell, the commissioner in 1891, was an alderman; Dalby, the commissioner in 1901, was a realtor. Neither of them would have wanted to represent the Queen City, as Victoria was styled in contemporary promotional literature, in a negative way. Certainly there was nothing to be gained by revealing large numbers of sex-trade workers on local census returns. The census commissioners may have conveyed this attitude to their enumerators who, it would seem, were agreeable to the pretense.

Alternatively, the charade might be understood by considering the role and responsibilities of enumerators. Having been sworn in as census officers, enumerators were supposed to carry out their work diligently. They were instructed to record verbatim information provided to them and

94 The names of census officers in British Columbia are published in the (Canadian government) Auditor General's Report for 1901–1902. See Canada. *Sessional Papers*, I (1903), vol. 37, pp. D114–D120, D279. The 1901 *Henderson's British Columbia Gazetteer and Directory* indicates that William Dalby's office was located at 64 Yates Street near the corner of Broad Street. Robert Drury's office was located at 34 Broad Street.

95 Bettina Bradbury, "Canadian Children Who Lived with One Parent in 1901" in Sager and Baskerville, eds., *Household Counts*, p. 257.

96 *Oxford Pocket Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

not to insert any information that was not “explicitly stated or distinctly acknowledged to them.” It was not their duty to challenge, edit, or annotate any information. Rather, their task was to conduct themselves with discretion and tact to win the confidence and secure the cooperation of the public. In most cases, at least in Victoria, they played their part in the solemn inquest of the nation by the book and to the letter. Social historians can be grateful that they did so. Thanks to the efforts of these conscientious and, we might suppose, conventional men — who otherwise worked as clerks, salesmen, accountants, and insurance agents — we have records of some rather unconventional women.

### Interpreting the Records

As our understanding of these records increases, we can utilize them more efficiently as research tools that may shed light on the *demi-monde*, but we must handle the records with care. As British historian Edward Higgs remarked, nineteenth-century census records pertaining to women and women’s occupations must always be treated with “caution,” and historians using these records need to be “circumspect.”<sup>97</sup> These are useful *caveats* and might be applied to nominal census records in general, not only to those relating to women. Higgs’s *caveats* remind us of the nuanced nature of census data, and social historians need to be cautious in using aggregate data to assert larger themes. Complex social entities and relationships may be embedded in aggregate data. The occupation of dressmaker is an exemplar in this respect. According to official returns from the 1891 census of Canada, 343 women in British Columbia were employed as dressmakers.<sup>98</sup> As we now know, not all of those women supported themselves using their skills with needle and thread. In all likelihood, some of the young, unmarried women who were identified as dressmakers in other Canadian cities were probably involved with the sex trade.<sup>99</sup> Dressmaker, however, is not the only signifier. We might be equally cautious in approaching aggregate data relating to seamstresses or lodging house keepers. In fact, we may feel hesitant in

97 Edward Higgs, “Women, Occupation and Work in Nineteenth Century Censuses,” *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 23 (1987), p. 76. Higgs expands on his approach to historical census data in his monograph, *The Information State in England: The Central Collection of Information on Citizens since 1500* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

98 Canada. *Census of Canada 1890–91/Recensement du Canada*, vol. II (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, Queen’s Printer, 1893), p. 141.

99 An analysis of the 1871 census of Ontario by Kris Inwood and Richard Reid suggests that sex-trade workers may be hidden within aggregate data for dressmakers. The authors note: “Among dressmakers (but not weavers), female proprietors lived in smaller and more urban households with a lower ratio of children to adults.” Brothels in Victoria, which were headed by dressmakers like Bertha Baker, would fit this profile. See Inwood and Reid, “Gender and Occupational Identity in a Canadian Census,” p. 67.

taking any occupation — including actresses, milliners, nurses, and music teachers — at face value. This is not to say that we should distrust and disregard the data entirely. However, we need to be mindful of the ambiguous character of nineteenth-century nominal census schedules. Although these records offer a cornucopia of evidence about late Victorian society, the records can be problematic, and some of the *prima facie* evidence they offer is misleading. Sometimes the problems are due to “misreporting,” a term Richard Steckel used to explain certain anomalies in nineteenth-century American census records.<sup>100</sup> Sometimes, however, as in the cases described here, the problems are due to misinformation.

As historians, we might reasonably expect to encounter misinformation, especially when we probe a milieu defined by sex, money, and artifice. Still, we need some means of determining the character of the records. Perhaps the best way of assessing the reliability of information recorded on nominal census schedules and detecting misinformation is to consider the records in context. Ideally, researchers should try to situate the records spatially; that is, researchers should endeavour to associate information about a person within the context of the person’s census family and community. Of course, we also need to be alert for occupational codes. Dressmaker was a popular disguise in the city of Victoria, but in other communities other disguises may have been used. In Dawson City, for example, brothel-keepers were enumerated as tobacconists and cigar dealers.<sup>101</sup>

With these *caveats* in mind, researchers might follow the methodology utilized in this study to explore the *demi-monde* in different parts of Canada. For example, social historians interested in the sex trade in Halifax might have a close look at census households on Barrack Street and Albemarle Street.<sup>102</sup> For Winnipeg, researchers might look at census households on Thomas Street, Annabella Street, and the Point Douglas district, while historians interested in prostitution in Vancouver might focus on census households along Dupont Street.<sup>103</sup> Eventually, we may be able to construct and compare prosopographical profiles of sex-trade workers in different parts of Canada. As well, these data may enable historians to map moral geographies in urban places and examine the cartography of sexual commerce in different cities. With these data, we may see more clearly how prostitutional space was constructed

100 Richard H. Steckel, “The Quality of Census Data for Historical Inquiry: A Research Agenda,” *Social Science History*, vol. 15, no. 4 (Winter 1991), p. 594. Steckel suggested that “misreporting” was the cause of discrepancies in the ages and illiteracy rates of certain groups across decennial censuses. He did not consider the problem of misinformation.

101 Porsild, *Dreamers and Gamblers*, pp. 122, 125.

102 Judith Fingard, *Jack in Port. Sailortowns of Eastern Canada*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), pp. 134–137, and *The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax* (Porter’s Lake, NS: Pottersfield Press, 1989), pp. 95–125.

103 Gray, *Red Lights on the Prairies*, pp. 37–55; Hinthier, “The Oldest Profession in Winnipeg,” *passim*; Nilson, “The Social Evil: Prostitution in Vancouver,” *passim*.

and regulated in Canada in the Victorian era.<sup>104</sup> Not only might we examine historical aspects of the sex trade across Canada; we might also compare the Canadian experience with sexual commerce in the United States, Great Britain and elsewhere.<sup>105</sup>

The historical census in Canada has been described as “a text that encodes a three-way relationship between the government, the enumerators, and the enumerated.”<sup>106</sup> As this study has shown, the relationship was complex, and the code is not always apparent. Indeed, the process of enumeration examined here might be characterized as a kind of performance. Record-takers (census commissioners and enumerators) and respondents (female sex-trade workers) both played a part and understood their respective roles in the performance. In this charade, the respondents were disguised, and because of their disguises they are not readily visible to historians. We can discern brothel-keepers, brothel prostitutes, and crib prostitutes in Victoria thanks to a large pool of digital data and the query interface available on the *viHistory* website. Having a large pool of machine-readable data and an application that links census records to directory listings and individuals to census households was invaluable in carrying out this project. However, researchers do not require digital tools for this kind of study. Rather, and as noted at the start, it is possible to identify urban sex-trade workers in late Victorian cities if we have some knowledge about local sites of sexual commerce and if we relate those areas to enumeration units. The next step is to read nominal census schedules closely, by considering the records in context and being cognizant of certain code words, especially the descriptors that female sex-trade workers offered when the enumerator enquired about their occupation, trade, or calling. Locating these women, who have been concealed and camouflaged on nominal census schedules for over a century, is a challenging task, but the reward may lie in opportunities for further research and understanding. If we look carefully, we may be able to find these women; once we can see them, we may be able to hear what they have to say.

104 For a spatial and theoretical analysis, see Patrick A. Dunae, “Geographies of Sexual Commerce and the Production of Prostitutional Space, Victoria, British Columbia, 1860–1914,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, new series, vol. 19, no. 1 (2008), pp. 115–142.

105 Joel Best’s study of prostitution in St. Paul, Minnesota (1982) and Marion Goldman’s study of prostitution in Nevada (1981) may provide useful reference points for a comparative study, since they draw on census records and situate brothels spatially within their respective communities. See also Neil Larry Shumsky and Larry M. Spring, “San Francisco’s Zone of Prostitution, 1880–1934,” *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 7, no. 1 (1981), pp. 71–89; Philip Howell, “A Private Contagious Diseases Act: Prostitution and Public Space in Victorian Cambridge,” *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 26, no. 3 (2000), pp. 376–402; Mark Wild, “Red Light Kaleidoscope: Prostitution and Ethnoracial Relations in Los Angeles, 1880–1940,” *Journal of Urban Geography*, vol. 28, no. 6 (September 2002), pp. 720–742.

106 Cynthia Comacchio, “‘The History of Us’: Social Science, History, and the Relations of Family in Canada,” *Labour / Le Travail*, vol. 46 (Fall 2000), p. 183.